



# ON TRACK

The E-Bulletin of the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers

[www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)

[marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)

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The Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers, Inc. (MARP) is a 501 (c)(3) non-profit corporation established in 1973 to improve passenger train service, travel conditions for passengers, and to work for the preservation of historic rail stations.

Monthly meetings are held at locations around the state. Check the website for dates and venues. The public is invited to attend.

## MARP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2020-2022

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<i>The Michigan Passenger Editor and Webmaster, Larry Sobczak</i>	
<i>ON TRACK Editor, Kay Chase</i>	

## 2021 MEETINGS

**28 January** – Member Meeting  
Virginia High Speed Rail

**18 March** – Member Meeting  
Amtrak has Plans for Ohio  
Zoom at 5:00 PM

**15 April** – Member Meeting  
Toledo Passenger Rail Committee  
Zoom at 5:00 PM

**Executive Committee**  
3<sup>rd</sup> Wednesday  
of the Month

**Fall Date TBA**  
48<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting

**Visit [www.marp.org](http://www.marp.org)**  
**Email [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com)**

## COVID-Relief Bill Proposes \$1.5 Billion for Amtrak

The U.S. House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee on 10 February batted down an anti-Amtrak amendment (eight Republicans joined the 32 Democrats to deliver the blow) **to advance a bill that includes \$1.5 billion for Amtrak and \$30 billion for transit agencies around the country to help alleviate the effects of the pandemic on both costs and revenues.**

An important component of this legislation is a mandate for Amtrak to restore daily service on the long-distance trains and to bring back workers furloughed after October 2020.

Amtrak CEO William Flynn [sent a letter to Congress in January](#) stating, “Amtrak requires additional COVID relief funding to sustain and restore operations and recall employees through the remainder of FY21 and into FY22 and beyond.” Telegraphing likely elements of Amtrak’s annual report to Congress and 2022 grant request, Flynn included in the letter a proposal for a passenger rail trust fund, the need for access to the rails for new and expanded corridor services and enforcement of preference rights over freight.

Some of the relief funding proposed for Amtrak will flow to state-supported corridors—and thus our three Michigan routes—in the form of help in paying operating costs not covered by current ticket revenues. Restoration of one, if not both, of the suspended *Wolverine* trains depends on this.

The bill faces hurdles on the way to final approval, but there are indications of significant Congressional support. Rail and transit advocates will be crucial in rallying the support needed to get the job done. **See the Action Alert on page 3** for information on how to contact your member of Congress and what to ask for.

Remember. Your call or email will be more effective if you tell your lawmaker why passenger trains are important to you. Lawmakers may start to yawn when they get scores of letters all alike, but will sit up and take notice when a personal story comes along. As Rail Passengers Association’s CEO Jim Mathews keeps saying, **“Tell your member of Congress, ‘I live here, I vote here and I care about trains!’”**

## MARP 2021 Meeting Schedule

Due to the continuing COVID-19 crisis, MARP has suspended in-person meetings indefinitely. We urge you to [get acquainted with Zoom](#) as meetings will be held using this platform. The Executive Committee will continue to meet via Zoom on the third Wednesday of each month. If you have ideas to contribute, questions or concerns, please send them to us at [marprail@yahoo.com](mailto:marprail@yahoo.com). If you would like to participate in the meetings, please contact MARP Chair John Guidinger at [jhguidinger1@yahoo.com](mailto:jhguidinger1@yahoo.com).

**OUR VISION**  
**What Should Michigan Passenger Rail Look Like in 2045?**

MARP Comments Submitted to Michigan Mobility 2045  
 State Long Range Planning Process  
 10 February 2021

MARP wants to see a system of intercity trains that are modern, fast, reliable, and operate on frequent, regular-interval schedules to meet the travel needs of all passengers.

On the corridor between Chicago and Detroit/Pontiac departures should be hourly or bi-hourly. The trains should connect all significant population centers in Michigan with other population centers in Michigan and centers throughout the United States and Canada. The system must be closely integrated with other means of public passenger travel to allow seamless transfer from one mode to the other and to promote travel into Michigan.

We believe that the reduced dependency on road travel will bring enormous economic benefit to Michigan through the rejuvenation of the downtown areas of our cities, increased tourism, expansion of rail-oriented industry, and a less hectic lifestyle. These important societal advantages will accrue over road travel even when travel times are similar. Other advantages include reducing conflicts with urban and rural land uses, improving human mobility and convenience, reducing road congestion, decreasing the need for costly road expansion, increasing travel safety, conserving energy resources, reduction of impacts to air and water resources, and improving space utilization.

We believe Michigan is in a unique position to optimize the return on assets from its ownership and previous investments in rail service, both passenger and freight.

**READ MARP'S COMPLETE SUBMISSION HERE**  
[www.marp.org/?p=7113](http://www.marp.org/?p=7113)

*MARP officers met on 4 February with MDOT representatives and planners working to develop a 25-year framework for an integrated, multi-modal transportation network to move people and goods throughout Michigan. You are invited, as well, to submit written comments to Kyle Haller, Michigan Mobility 2045, P.O. Box 30050, Lansing, MI 48909. Or, go to [MichiganMobility.org](http://MichiganMobility.org) and click on "Contact Us" at the top of the page to send your comments electronically. Remember that you are speaking as an individual and not as a representative of MARP.*



## High Speed Rail Alliance



**Brown Bag Lunch:  
 Stadler's New Rolling  
 Stock**

February 26, 2021  
 12:00 CT, 13:00 ET

**REGISTER HERE**



**Brown Bag Lunch:  
 OBB on Operating  
 Austrian Passenger  
 Rail**

March 05, 2021  
 13:00 CT, 14:00 ET

**REGISTER HERE**



## ENVIRONMENTAL LAW & POLICY CENTER

**ELPC THINKS WEBINAR**  
**Challenges and Opportunities for  
 Passenger and Freight Rail**

with featured speaker Martin Oberman  
 Chairman of the Surface Transportation Board  
 Friday, March 5, 12:00 pm CT, 1:00 pm ET

Oberman served as Chairman of Metra and the Chicago City Council. He was appointed to the Surface Transportation Board in January 2019 and was recently named its Chairman by President Biden. The Surface Transportation Board's economic regulation of railroads has major impacts on the freight rail industry, as well as Amtrak, METRA, and other passenger rail carriers.

**REGISTER HERE**

## MARP Members Impressed with Virginia's Passenger Rail Expansion Plans

Some 41 MARP members and friends met “virtually” on January 28 to hear about the many exciting initiatives to improve and expand passenger train services in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Our speaker was Danny Plaugher, the very energetic and inspiring executive director of [Virginians for High Speed Rail](#).

Mr. Plaugher recapped the progress seen in his state in recent years and detailed a number of the game changing developments of the past year. In recent years, Virginia has seen a 31% increase in passenger rail service and a 21% increase in ridership as a result of making new or expanded service available to 6.8 million of its citizens.

In December 2019, Governor Northam announced a \$3.7 B ["Transforming Rail in Virginia" initiative](#) with the potential to bring a 53% increase Amtrak Regional service and a 39% increase in VRE commuter service. Under the plan, the state is purchasing 350 corridor miles of CSX track and building a 2<sup>nd</sup> Potomac River Railroad “Long Bridge” that doubles capacity and provides 2 dedicated tracks for passenger trains between Washington DC and Richmond VA and beyond.

The legislature followed up with an omnibus funding bill, creating a dedicated [Commonwealth Rail Fund](#) that will increase passenger rail funding from \$13M to \$167M a year and grow as sales and gas tax revenues increase. VHSR had a role in getting this before the legislature.

Also enacted was legislation creating the [Virginia Passenger Rail Authority \(VPRA\)](#) which will serve as the legal entity by which the Commonwealth will own and manage rail infrastructure throughout the state, something Plaugher's group has championed for 20 years. By establishing VPRA as an independent authority, lawmakers have also placed it a bit further outside the political process. 93% of every dollar put into the [Commonwealth Rail Fund](#) will go to the VPRA to expand, improve, and sustain passenger rail infrastructure.

Another long-sought project of Plaugher's group is the [Commonwealth Corridor Study](#), to be completed later this year, looking at the feasibility of E-W cross-state service, service that doesn't exist today.

Plaugher said that [Virginians for High Speed Rail](#) has helped advance transformative measures by: staying focused on the vision and goals; collecting data to support the arguments; doing lots of outreach statewide; and taking advantage of opportunities presented. They often work directly with legislators (sometimes getting into “a little good trouble”, to borrow a phrase from the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis), but also maintain a good relationship with the Rail Office.

Plaugher, as paid director of VHSR, spends full-time traveling the state and talking with Rotary Clubs, Chambers of Commerce, community leaders and legislators. VHSR has

## COVID-Relief ACTION ALERT!

Please call or write your member of Congress TODAY.

State why you are asking for Congress's help in assuring the survival of the passenger train and transit services so vital to the lives of millions of Americans. Tell why this is important to you, personally.

Ask that the following provisions be included in any COVID-19 relief package:

- \$1.5 billion for Amtrak. This funding will allow the railroad to restore long-distance service to pre-COVID levels, start bringing back employees furloughed due to COVID, and help states like Michigan meet payments for State-supported and commuter rail services.
- Guidelines stipulating that Amtrak MUST return daily service to the National Network by this summer.
- \$30 billion for mass transit.

Thank her/him for their help in maintaining these critical transportation services.

<Your name>

<Your home address, including zip code>

<Your telephone number>

**Click on links below to send your message**

[stabenow.senate.gov/contact](http://stabenow.senate.gov/contact)

[peters.senate.gov/contact/email-gary](http://peters.senate.gov/contact/email-gary)

[house.gov/representatives/find](http://house.gov/representatives/find)

You can also call the Congressional Switchboard at 202-224-3121 and ask to be connected to your Senator's or Representative's office.

a 30-40 member board composed of former elected officials, business interests and environmental groups from across the state). VHSR has 300 donors (individuals, localities, foundations) and a mailing list of 20,000.

[CLICK HERE](#) to view a similar presentation Mr. Plaugher gave for the “Brown Bag Lunch” series at HSRail.org.



[CLICK HERE TO ENLARGE MAP](#)

## View from elsewhere . . .

*“The American people desperately want us to bring our roads, trains and bridges out of the last century and into the future.”*

--Senator Tom Carper, Chair of the Environment & Public Works Committee, following an 11 Feb meeting with President Biden and a bi-partisan group of Senators to **discuss infrastructure investments**. Carper added that he's preparing a bill to reauthorize surface transportation programs with a focus on reducing the transportation sector's greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) and creating jobs.

*“Transit is inherently sustainable, and this is just another example of how solar investment benefits, not just the environment, but the transit industry as a whole.”*

--SEPTA General Manager Leslie Richards, announcing that **the Elk Hill 2 solar farm project** in Franklin County PA is now operational. SEPTA's two solar farms provide nearly 10% of its annual 380,000 MWh electricity demand, or the equivalent of providing energy to more than 2,500 U.S. homes annually.



## Venture Car Road Test

The first “road test” of the Midwest’s new passenger coaches, the Siemen’s-built “Venture” cars, took place on the Michigan Line on January 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>. The new cars are to begin revenue service in Illinois this spring. The 88-car order will continue to be delivered at the rate of four each month. The new equipment is expected to be in service on all seven of the state supported routes in Illinois, Michigan and Missouri by the end of 2023.

*Photo courtesy of Kenneth Borg.*

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*Passengers 4,5,6 – 70% off full price*



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Livonia, MI 48154-2952

## Contact Your Lawmaker

Congressional Switchboard

202-224-3121

**Sen. Debbie Stabenow**

**Sen. Gary Peters**

**Find Your Congressperson**

**Find Your State Senator**

**Find Your State Representative**